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ABSTRACT

Learning magic tricks permits behaviorally and emotionally handicapped children to become magicians in the eyes of adults, their peers, and themselves. The self-contained classes of handicapped boys in grades 3 through 6 have put on numerous magic shows since 1984. Program objectives include building self-esteem, teaching team cooperation, improving group dynamics, improving organizational skills, and giving students a chance to gain positive recognition from others. This paper describing the "Magic Kids" program discusses these objectives, offers group rules for making magic work in the classroom, gives additional suggestions for teachers, and provides guidelines on giving a magic show. The magic show format used by the Magic Kids is included. (DB)

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THE MAGIC KIDS: A STRATEGY TO BUILD SELF-ESTEEM AND CHANGE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE HANDICAPPED

Classrooms need more magic! Magic tricks are exciting to young and old alike and the concept of "The Magic Kids" permits behaviorally emotionally handicapped children to become magicians in the eyes of adults, their peers, and themselves. Session members will learn the justification for the concept, the application, will experience hands-on activities, and will receive a handbook.

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THE MAGIC KIDS: A STRATEGY TO BUILD SELF-ESTEEM AND CHANGE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE HANDICAPPED

Magic tricks are exciting to young and old alike. As much as the more mature among us are loathe to admit it, a truly baffling illusion excites that spark deep inside us to make us wonder if the trick was really magic and not just illusion. The young and less mature feel no need to question the source of the magic. They simply marvel at the fruits of the conjurer's labors. They are content to be transported to that land of makebelieve in which the magician is master.

The concept of "The Magic Kids" permits behaviorally emotionally handicapped children to take this special position in the eyes of adults, their peers and themselves. They are the holders of the mysteries. As holders of the mysteries, the audiences view the students as bright and dynamic - not handicapped or crazy. The students receive acclamation from peers and adults which contribute to positive self-esteem.

"The Magic Kids" are self-contained elementary behaviorally emotionally handicapped students in grades three throught six. From

1984 until the present, my classes have put on numerous magic shows for regular classes, PTA, Very Special Arts Festival, teacher retirement banquets, and student orientation assemblies. In preparing and presenting these shows, an atmosphere of teamwork was created in our classroom. The spirit of teamwork, cooperation and cohesion created by preparing and presenting "The Magic Kids" spilled over into all areas of the children's school life. Benefits were seen both in the academic areas and in the children's social progress, both among their peers and among adults. The students received letters of thanks from students and teachers in the mainstream about the illusions and talents of the performers.

Magic builds self-esteem and changes attitudes toward handicapped students. Each child gained confidence and took pride in his performance and in the performances of the other class members. All class members were responsible for learning all the illusions presented by "The Magic Kids". Each child was, therefore an understudy for all other members of the troupe and could fill in for any group member who was absent or unwilling to perform. Learning the magic tricks can be used as a reinforcer for work well done or good behavior. The team approach generates positive peer pressure that motivates all to participate and gradually builds group cooperation and trust.

To perform feats of magic requires planning and forethought. Magicians read a lot and practice to become convincing. A magician must be organized and often their magicial tricks tell a story to the audience. It requires enthusiasm and confidence to

perform in front of others and get the audience involved. The good student magician learns to laugh at his own mistakes and is an entertainer bringing joy and excitement to others.

Magic is educational. Students can learn magic tricks as a part of their academic regimen because magical concepts are part of science, memory, math, perception, and creativity. Magic tricks can be set up in a learning center in the classroom to promote trial and error experimentation, reading and organization.

The techniques used with "The Magic Kids" are adaptable for use in other classrooms. As teachers, we can capitalize on the thrill of magic and help our students gain the self-confidence and positive recognition mentioned above. During the "Spotlight" session, the participants will hear the justification and application of the strategy. They will see a brief video of "The Magic Kids" and the participants themselves will have the opportunity to practice the illusions and feats of magic. In conclusion, all participants will receive a handbook to aid them in their classrooms in using the techniques learned during the session.

Paper presented at the Annual Convention
of the Council for Exceptional Children
67th, San Francisco, CA, April 3-7, 1989

The Magic Kids

A Strategy to Build
Cooperation and Self Esteem

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1987

WHO ARE THE MAGIC KIDS?

Magic tricks are exciting to young and old alike. As much as the more mature among us are loathe to admit it a truly baffling illusion excites that spark deep inside us to make us wonder if the trick was really magic and not just illusion. The young and less mature feel no need to question the source of the magic. They simply marvel at the fruits of the conjurer's labors. They are content to be transported to that land of makebelieve in which the magician is master.

The concept of The "Magic Kids" permits these children to take this special position in the eyes of adults, their peers and themselves. They are the holders of the mysteries.

"The Magic Kids" are a group of elementary (grade 3 through 5) self-contained behavior disordered boys. These boys prepared a magic show and presented it eight times during the spring of 1986.

In preparing and presenting these shows an atmosphere of teamwork was created in these student's classroom. The spirit of teamwork, cooperation and cohesion created by preparing and presenting "The Magic Kids" spilled over into all areas of the children's school life. Benefits were seen both in the academic areas and in the children's social progress, both among their peers and among adults.

Each boy gained confidence and took pride in his performance and in the performances of the other class members. The group received recognition throughout the school and in the community. This recognition helped eleviate some of the stigma attached to being a member of a special class with behavior problems.

All class members were responsible for learning all of the illusions presented by "The Magic Kids". Each boy was, therefore, an understudy for all other members of the troupe and could fill in for any group member who was absent of unwilling to perform.

Magic is educational. To perform feats of magic requires planning and forethought. Magicians read a lot and practice to become convincing. It requires confidence to perform in front of others. Magicians must be organized and often their magical tricks tell a story to the audience. They must be enthusiastic to get the audience involved. The good magician can laugh at his own mistakes and is an expert entertainer bringing joy and excitement to others.

As teachers, we can capitalize on the thrill of magic and help our students gain the self-confidence mentioned above. Students can learn magic tricks as a part of their academic regimen because magical concepts are part of science, memory, math, perception, and creativity. Magic tricks can be used as a reinforcer for work well done or good behavior. Working together as a team to put on a magic show teaches group cooperation and trust. Magic tricks can be set up in a learning center in the classroom to promote trial and error experimentation, reading, and organization.

The techniques used with "The Magic Kids" are adaptable for use in other classrooms. During the presentation of this project the participants will themselves delve into the world of illusion and magic by preparing and presenting feats of prestidigitation and thaumaturgy during the workshop. After watching a video performance by "The Magic Kids" the participants will put on their own magic show. All participants will receive a handbook to aid them in their classrooms in using the techniques learned during the workshop.

Objectives:

1. To build self-esteem.
2. To cooperate as a team to create a finished product - a magic show.
3. To improve group dynamics.
4. To improve organizational skills.
5. To give the students a chance to gain positive recognition from peers and adults.

How Can Magic Build Self-Esteem?

Each student passes judgment on himself and this self-evaluation has a profound effect on his behavior. Branden (1969) says that a person's self-esteem "is the single most significant key to his behavior." To understand a person psychologically, one must "understand the nature and degree of his self-esteem, and the standards by which he judges himself" (Branden, 1969).

When a student has low self-esteem, he tends to give up. He may act hostile to cover up fear of failure. A student with low self-esteem may withdraw from the group or the learning task, consciously or subconsciously, to avoid a situation which may result in failure. He feels that something is wrong with him and that he will never function as a "normal" person. Being in a special class adds to these negative feelings because the child is segregated from his peer group. The teacher must make a special effort to prove to the child that he can learn something and be successful.

The use of magic in the classroom allows the student to learn. He can learn a new trick and practice it until he can perform it well every time. Many magic

tricks practically work themselves once you teach the student the gimmick involved. The mystery of the trick will get the child's attention and once you have him "hooked" on the excitement of magic, he will be willing to try to do the trick himself. Then he can perform the trick in front of a mirror to prove to himself that he really is doing magic. The teacher can then proceed by getting him to show the trick to one person and so on until he begins to feel confidence in front of others.

When regular class students see special class students performing magic tricks, they gain a new perception of what the special student can do. The more positive comments the student hears, the better his self-image will become. As the student gains confidence and becomes part of the performing group, as in "The Magic Kids", he also becomes identified with that group and assumes the credit and praise that the group receives. Being a "Magic Kid" gives him an identity role that is positive and successful. Every positive experience that teachers can give a student with low self-esteem helps the therapeutic process of making that student feel like a worthwhile person.

What Are Group Dynamics and How Does Magic Help?

The definition given by Dinkmeyer, (1971), states that group dynamics is a term that refers to the interacting forces within groups as they operate to achieve objectives.

Working together to accomplish a goal is an important part of the group process. The group must establish their goal, formulate a plan, and carry it out. To conclude the process, the group can evaluate themselves by checking to see if all group members participated and by looking at the outcome of their finished product.

The "Magic Kids" must work as a team to produce a magic show. They must help each other master all the illusions, learn to "load" or prepare the tricks, and serve as an audience to "positively" crique each other's performance. Producing a magic show forms cohesiveness in the group. When the show is a success, the group is a success and the members learn that they can depend on

one another. Students learn that they can enjoy sharing an experience with others rather than being a loner. The "Magic Kids" gives the group an indentity which signifies fun and mystique rather than being seen solely in terms of their label as BEH students.

How Can Magic Improve Organizational Skills?

Children with behavior and learning problems are often disorganized. They have difficulty keeping up with their work even after they have made the effort to complete it. These students have messy desks and do not remember to bring back notes that were to be signed by their parents. Organization and memory can improve with practice. Teachers try to give cues and tasks which will require the students to be organized. These tasks incorporate repetition, association, and rituals, (Lerner, 1976). The same elements are present when learning to perform magic tricks. The student must remember how the trick is performed, what "patter" or verbalizations accompany the trick, and the sequence of events which make the trick appealing to the audience and provide the best effect. This practice in organizational skills helps the student improve. The student is motivated to practice the sequence of tasks because he wants to master the trick or illusion. These tricks and illusions are more enticing than purely academic tasks. Magic provides an enjoyable way to practice sequencing and organization. It helps the student learn organizational skills which will help him in other aspects of life.

Making Magic Work in Your Class

Group Rules

1. Everyone in the group must listen when someone else is talking.
2. A student may elect to be an audience participant and will not be forced to perform.
3. Feedback on a group member's performance must be given in a helpful, not hurtful, way.
4. Every member of the group must participate in some way.
5. The equipment must be used as directed.

These rules or similar rules should be posted and discussed frequently. This strategy will not be successful if students are allowed to abuse the magic tricks or use the magic tricks as a way of excluding peers. When working with behavior disordered students, the rules must be reviewed often. Behavior disordered students often have a short attention span and forget what is expected of them.

Suggestions For Teachers

1. Stop disturbances early.

2. Use well prepared lessons-make sure you have a good understanding of the magic trick before you try to teach it to your students.

3. Be enthusiastic-tell the students they are dramatic and do a good performance.

4. Model behavior you wish to see in your class by your own performance.

5. Build self-esteem through success. Encourage the students to practice in front of mirrors so they can judge how their performance looks to others and as they become more skilled, video tape their performance.

Introduce a new trick each day. I always present tricks during our Group Meeting which usually lasts about fifteen (15) minutes. You perform the trick first to get the student's attention. Then, step-by-step, teach the students how the trick is done. Allow one or two students to come forward and try to perform the trick for the class. Remind the class that they must be a good audience for the "magician" because they will need a good audience to practice on when it is their turn. As the student or students perform the trick, offer guidance as needed. Be sure to clap and praise the "magician". Then place the trick in the Magic Learning Center or in an appropriate place in the room where the students can practice during their free time.

Introduce a new trick each day until they have mastered enough tricks for a short magic show. The "Magic Kids" performed nine tricks during their show, but the number of tricks comprising the show will vary greatly depending on the tricks used and the elaborateness of their presentation.

Then begin to build a line-up for the show. Decide which students should perform each trick. Most tricks can have at least one magician and his assistant. Pair your students so that weak ones can do something they can handle without failure or embarrassment. I had ten students and divided them into two teams. Each team performed the same tricks in order with only slight variations. That plan works well especially if someone is absent or has stage fright on opening night. Then another student is always ready to take his place. Our performances before classes in the school were so well received that we were asked to perform before the P.T.A., the Very Special Arts Festival, and other large audiences. The group of ten then became one team and each student either presented or assisted in a trick.

To eliminate confusion on stage, I lined the students up single file on stage in their order of appearance. They came forward as their name was called, presented their trick, bowed, and exited into the audience to watch the show. I served as Master of Ceremonies to give the show cohesion and to boister the student's confidence.

A suitcase can be decorated to hold your tricks. I used the case from a TAD or DUSO kit. This makes it easy to transport the tricks and lifting the lid, facing the audience, can screen the performer at crucial times.

A table or cart is a must. This is used in presenting and displaying many illusions. Chairs for audience volunteers are also needed. Oh yes, be sure to use lots of audience volunteers! This improves your show immeasurably.

Be sure to start and end the show with a trick which is a real attention grabber. Have a short poem (I used "Magic" by Shel Siverstein) or comments prepared in case you need to vamp for time because a trick has failed.

My students thought of their own name for their group and it seemed to give the group cohesion and pride. We also took a lot of pictures during performances so that they could be enjoyed afterwards.

The Magic Show Format Used by the Magic Kids

1. Introduction by the Teacher (Master of Ceremonies).

2. Start the Show with a Bang - Illusion: Student raises the magic wand and it makes a popping sound and a fireball is produced from one end of the Magic Wand.

3. Magic Time Capsule - Illusion: An empty clear plastic tube is shown. An audience volunteer writes his name on a slip of paper - the slip of paper is put into the tube. The tube is rolled up in a newspaper and the volunteer holds both ends of the newspaper and sits on stage for the rest of the show. As the grand finale of the show, the slip of paper is found in the Magic Hat. It has been transported through time! The volunteer unwraps the newspaper and the tube is empty.

4. Mind Reader - Illusion: The Mind Reader uses Clairvoyance to tell the amount of money an audience volunteer has in his pocket, uses ESP to name an object in an audience volunteer's pocket, and uses Prediction to tell which shape an audience volunteer will choose before he chooses it.

5. Cane to Silks - Illusion: A cane changes into a white silk and blue silk.

6. Silk Color Change - Illusion: A single sheet of black construction paper is shown, it is rolled into a tube. A blue silk is put into the tube. The Magician blows into the tube and a red silk comes out. The tube is unrolled and is empty.

7. Silk "Clean" "Up" Bag - Illusion: An empty bag is shown. A red silk, a white silk, and a blue silk are put into the bag. A magic word is said, and the Magician reaches into the bag and pulls out the American Flag. He then shows the bag again and it is empty.

8. Disappearing Kool Aid - Illusion: Magician shows a fish bowl with sand inside. An audience volunteer pours clear water into the fish bowl. He then pours in red Kool Aid which vanishes.

9. Magic Hat - Illusion: Magician shows an empty hat. He then sprinkles in in confetti and has the audience say a magic word. He then reaches into the hat and pulls out streamers, flowers, an egg, a glass of milk, and the slip of paper from the Time Capsule.

10. End the Show with a Bang - Illusion: Same as 2 above.

THE END

Beginning Magic With as Few Expenses as Possible

1. Cold-Hot-Cold
2. The Mind Reader
3. Disappearing Kool Aid
4. Time Capsule
5. Human Elevator
6. Cutting a Person in Two
7. Needle Through a Balloon
8. Envelope Change

The Magician's Pledge requires all magicians never to reveal the secret of their illusions unless teaching the illusions to a fellow magician likewise bound by this likewise bound by this pledge of honor. Participants in the workshop will be asked to undertake this pledge and to approach the learning of these illusions with the same degree of seriousness shown by my students. Only after taking the pledge will the secrets of these illusions be revealed.

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